**BOOK OF JAMES INTRO AND CHAPTER 1**

**JAMES 1:1-27**

This morning we’re going to begin a 5-part study of the Book of JAMES. Introduction: JAMES was written by James the Just as he was known in the First Century. He was the younger half-brother of Jesus. James became a leader of the Jerusalem church during the earliest days of Christianity. Paul in his letter to the Galatians (1:19) mentions that he visited with James on his initial trip back to Jerusalem after his conversion. James is mentioned in Acts in several places. So James was a prominent figure in the early church. This James here is NOT the same James as either one of Jesus two disciples by that name. James the Just, our writer, did not come to faith in Christ until after Jesus' resurrection. However, after his conversion he became quite a devoted follower of Jesus. I read where James had the nickname “old camel knees” because of his fervent dedication to prayer which caused calluses to form on his knees. That story plus his name, James the Just, say a great deal about the man and his reputation. In 62 A.D., James was martyred for his faith. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that he was stoned to death by the Jews in Jerusalem. But his words live on and we will be looking at them today.

I see the Book of JAMES as being to Christians what a marriage seminar is to married couples. It gives us the tools to examine, to re-focus and, hopefully, to help us fall in love with Jesus Christ all over again. JAMES is a practical “how to” of Christian behavior. My prayer is that as we study JAMES these next few weeks we’ll receive a great blessing and benefit from it.

I’m going to do something a little different this morning. I’m going to read thru the entire first chapter and make a few brief comments along the way. Then we’ll go back and focus in more detail on a few key verses. As we read thru this, I want you all be thinking of any questions or particular verses you would like to discuss further. OK? By the way, time permitting, toward the end, I will try to discuss the different perspectives offered by James and Paul, which have been the subject of a lot of debate by theologians and Bible scholars throughout church history.

READ James 1:1-27 (with commentary)

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. [target audience: Jewish Christians who have been scattered due to persecution] 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [so there’s a benefit to our trials and testing] 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing [the benefit is that we grow in our faith, maturing, becoming more and more like Christ]. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting [we pray in faith, with the confidence knowing that God hears us], for the one who doubts [without faith] is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. [James doesn’t paint a very good picture of a person without faith does he?] 9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits [whether a person is poor or rich doesn’t matter at all because the riches of this world will not last] 12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him [this is a central teaching in James – it’s thru the trials in our life that God allows our faith to be tested] 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death [temptations are different from trials and testing – God gives us trials whereas temptations are the result of our own evil desires]. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights [from God] with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures [God has a will and a purpose for us]. 19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God [our anger produces sin so it needs to be dealt with]. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word [God’s word], which is able to save your souls [the truth found in God’s word brings salvation]. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves [don’t just read and study God’s word, but obey it]. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer [not obedient], he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like [God’s word shows us who we really are and we then must deal with it and not ignore it]. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts [one who is obedient to God’s word], he will be blessed in his doing [obedience to God produces a blessing]. 26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless [if we don’t control what we say our religious practices, good as they might be, mean very little]. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this [here is what God wants us to do]: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world [twofold: care for the needs of others and stay away from sin].

So there you have James Chapter 1. Pretty straight forward, huh? So talk to me, what questions do you have? What verses would you like us to discuss in more detail?

V 1: Even though James target audience is the scattered Jewish Christians of the First Century, what he has to say to the people in his time still applies to us Christians today. We face discouragement, fear, uncertainty, problems, and temptations just as they did. And, like them, we need to hear words of encouragement from God's messenger.

V 5: God gives wisdom to anybody who asks for it. He gives generously. “Without reproach” means that He will not get angry with us or scold us when we ask Him for wisdom. If you don't understand something or if you don't know what to do when the trials of life come your way, pray and ask God to show you. With God's wisdom we can discern right from wrong. We can discover His perfect will for us in any situation that we face. We will then be able view our present circumstance from God's perspective.

V 6: "Ask in faith" means to ask expecting an answer from God. He wants us to know His will. God will give us direction if we ask Him and then it is up to us to be obedient to do what He tells us. Doubting God is serious because it means that we are not sure whether or not we can trust Him. James likens doubting to a wave tossed about by the wind. Doubting causes one to go back and forth between belief and unbelief, constantly shifting, unstable, undependable. On the other hand, trusting God provides stability in our life.

V 9-11: When the times of testing come, and they WILL come, both the rich and the poor believer will be on equal footing. For example, when you lose a loved one it really does not matter how much money you have. No amount of wealth can ease your pain or buy your way out of such an ordeal. Trials bring us to complete dependency upon God and put us all on the same level with each other. All that really matters in God's economy is our position in Christ, not our financial situation or our social status.

Some day we are all going to die and, when we do, we will take nothing with us. James reminds us that everything in this world is temporary. Don't be like the believer described in Mark 4:19 who allowed "the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” to enter in and choke the word, and he became unfruitful.

Don't be THAT guy! God is more interested in what lasts than what is temporary. He is more interested in our souls, in us, than He is in our money and our possessions. He wants us – ALL of us. Have you given your heart to Christ? Have you turned over complete control to Him?

V 18: How can we expect to endure life's trials, temptations and adversity if we have not spent time in God's word? How can we expect to live righteous lives pleasing to God if we don't know what He wants? How can we expect to be victorious in our Christian walk if we have not properly prepared ourselves for our enemy? Just for the record, our enemy is waiting to pounce on us just around the next bend in the road.

V 19-21: We need to know God's truth but we need to prepare ourselves first to receive it. Did you ever have to repaint a house whose paint was cracked and flaking off? What is it that needs to be done before you can apply the new coat of paint? The old paint needs to be scraped or sanded off. The surface needs to be prepared in order to receive the fresh paint.

James mentions four prerequisites to being prepared to receive the fresh paint of God's truth.

AN OPEN EAR. In verse 19 James says, "everyone must be quick to hear." It is one thing to hear. It is quite another to listen. Jesus was constantly rebuking the Pharisees because they knew the Scriptures, but it was merely an intellectual ascent. They failed to really pay attention to what the Scriptures were saying to them. We can become guilty of the exact same thing ourselves if we merely read God's word but don't listen to what it is saying to us personally.

A CONTROLLED TONGUE. James tells us to be "slow to speak." It has been said that no one can speak and learn at the same time. Have you ever been around someone who constantly talks? You can't get a word in edgewise! Too busy talking to hear anything that anyone else has to say. A person who talks too much is saying that their opinions are more important than the others around them. If we are not careful, however, we can become the same way with God. We can find ourselves praying, handing over our "to do" list, telling Him how we feel and not spending time to listen to the still small voice from either God's Holy Spirit or His Word.

A CALM SPIRIT. James instructs his readers to be "slow to anger." In verse 20 he explains the reason why this is vital: "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." In other words, man's anger does not produce God's righteousness in us. Anger that is focused on self is wrong – “I am hurt,” “I didn't get what I wanted or deserved,” “I've had enough.” It produces negative and often sinful actions such as thoughts of resentment, revenge and hatred. Anger hardens our heart so that the Word of God cannot take root and blossom in our lives. Not dealing constructively with anger is sin.

A CLEAN HEART. James says, "putting aside all filthiness." The idea of putting aside filthiness and humbly receiving the word of truth is what Paul talks about in Ephesians 4:22-24: “in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” In addition to ridding ourselves of obvious filthiness we are told to put aside "all that remains of wickedness.” In other words, all other forms of sin no matter how small they may seem to us. Get rid of all those hidden sins, motives and attitudes that are at the root of the ungodly behavior we are sometimes apt to display.

Verse 21 ends with a healthy reception of God's word: “in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” After we have prepared our hearts to receive God's truth, we welcome it with open arms. When truth knocks on our heart's door we should open it up and eagerly embrace it.

V 27: Genuine Christianity gives to those in need without any thought of receiving anything in return. Genuine Christianity is outward focused and self-less. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), Jesus taught an example of this. A man was beaten by robbers and left for dead on the side of the road. Those who claimed to be religious failed to minister to the man in need. But a certain Samaritan came along and met the man's needs using his own resources without reimbursement.

We need to take care of ourselves but our lives should not be centered completely on ourselves. We must be outwardly focused and sensitive to the needs of those in our circle of influence.

James adds a last phrase onto verse 27 – “and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” In case you haven’t noticed, the way of the world is quite selfish. "I have to look out for number one" seems to be the mantra of so many. Well the truth is that we Christians are supposed to be different. So different, in fact, that we stand out from the world. If we don't visit the fatherless and widows, if we don't minister to the hurting we come in contact with, then we become just like those in the world who cannot be bothered.

In closing I would like us to do a little inventory. Are you ready to receive God's truth? Before the seed of the Word can grow in your life, the soil needs to be prepared to receive it. Do you keep an open ear? Do you have a controlled tongue? Do you have a calm spirit? Do you have a clean heart? If you can answer "yes" to all of these then you are ready to receive God's truth. When you receive God's truth what do you do with it? There are two things we must do with the truth from the Word of God. We must share it with others and we must obey it ourselves.

*Illustration: the bridge is out*. So then, why don't we do that same thing with the truth we receive from the Bible?